

Three years in the making: EcoGrove Wind Farm formally begins operation



By Stefanie Weiss

John Blum, Chairman of Stephenson County's Board of Supervisors speaks to the crowd at the EcoGrove wind farm dedication Friday. There is open house for the community at the site Saturday, Sept. 19.

By PJ Francis

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Lena, Ill. -

“We are here today celebrating the dedication of the EcoGrove Wind Farm,” said Peter Duprey, CEO Acciona North America. “It has been about three years in the making.”

Duprey was the featured speaker at a Sept. 18 open house hosted by Acciona, which attracted area dignitaries and signaled the formal start of operations at the property north of Lena.

“(The farm) is 67 turbines, generates 100 megawatts, and there is enough power to electrify about 25,000 homes,” Duprey said. “We had about 125 people helping construct the project, and there will be about 11 local service people keeping the turbines running and doing ongoing maintenance.”

Duprey came to Acciona from General Electric Energy, where he was General Manager of Marketing for the company’s wind business.

The building housing the sub-station at the EcoGrove Wind Farm is built in the style of a traditional Midwestern barn complete with ornamental lightening deflectors and painted in barn red. That was the idea of Lisa Kelly, marketing administrator in the Acciona Chicago headquarters.

“This is a very good example of how wind energy really can blend into the community,” Mr. Duprey continued. “Stephenson County and Lena have really embraced us being here.”

He commended the road commissioners, Stephenson County Sheriff’s Department and the Lena Lions for their assistance throughout the construction work.

Duprey said the Lena project is a symbolic midway between the West Point, Iowa, manufacturing facility and the company’s corporate headquarters in Chicago.

Yesterday’s invitation-only dedication ceremony and luncheon at the EcoGrove Wind Farm was held to thank the many partners, landowners, and local community and state officials who made the project possible.

Stephen J. Konya, III, is the Chief of Staff of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). The department is responsible for improving Illinois’ competitiveness in the global economy. It is also responsible for establishing enterprise zones like the one that made the EcoGrove project possible.

“What a beautiful day it is today to hold an event like this,” Konya said.

He commended the sense of cooperation between the various individuals and bodies that brought the project to fruition.

“It is a perfect example of what can happen when people work together for the common good of a community,” Konya said.

Kim Smith, Vice President of Construction and Operations and Marketing Services at Acciona Energy North America since 2007.

She also commented on the beautiful weather saying perhaps a solar energy site would be a good idea.

Smith talked about the enormous quantity of materials used in the construction of EcoGrove Wind Farm. The amount of concrete used would fill six Olympic size swimming pools, she said. The quantity of cables used would go from Lena to Chicago if laid out in a straight line.

“The process leading to the establishment of EcoGrove in Stephenson County was challenging yet extremely collaborative,” said John Blum, Chairman of the Stephenson County Board of Supervisors. “Our shared vision included the coexistence of renewable energy technology with agriculture and rural neighbors. EcoGrove represents a significant shared investment by Acciona in conjunction with the taxpayers of Stephenson County. We anticipate a tremendous future return on this investment in the form of new jobs, new business, new educational programs and more opportunities to further develop our renewable energy sources. We welcome Acciona not only as a partner, but as a new neighbor,” Blum said.

Blum said while he had made many new friends and acquaintances he regretted having lost some. He hoped friendships can be renewed in the future.

The superintendents of Lena-Winslow and Warren school districts were each presented with a \$5,000 annual scholarship fund for deserving high school seniors planning to pursue a secondary education leading to a career contributing to sustainability.

The Northern Illinois Development Association was also presented with \$5,000 by Acciona.

Acciona is hosting a community-wide open house Saturday, Sept. 19, at the EcoGrove site near Lena. Citizens can enjoy refreshments while taking bus tours of the farm and even going inside the base of an actual turbine. Children can participate in crafts and other educational and recreational activities to learn more about wind energy.

There will be no parking on site. Instead there will be parking at Coaches Golf and Grill and shuttle buses will run from there. From Rt. 20 head north on Rt. 73 to West Lena Street (4-way stop) and turn left. Go about a mile to Coaches Golf and Grill on the east side of the street.